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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO HEAD OF  
OFFICE IN BAKU AMBASSADOR BILGE CANKOREL

¶1. Post is authorized to make the following statement at the  
July 9 meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna:

Begin Text:

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

We welcome Ambassador Cankorel to the Permanent Council, and  
thank him for his comprehensive report. The United States  
highly values the Office's work over the past year,  
particularly in providing election-related assistance to  
Azerbaijani authorities, seeking to strengthen media freedom  
and promoting good governance.

We applaud the expansion of the Office's community policing  
program. In our view, these innovative centers directly  
contribute to the safety and security of the Azerbaijani  
people. We also strongly support the Office's programs on  
counter-terrorism and combating corruption among law  
enforcement officials.

In the economic-environmental area, we believe the Office's  
efforts to promote good governance and reinforce the  
anti-corruption work of the Government are particularly  
important and should be continued.

We continue to support the work of the Office and the  
Representative on Freedom of the Media in their vital work to  
create a more pluralistic and open media environment in  
Azerbaijan, in line with OSCE commitments. We welcome  
President Aliyev's recent criticism of criminal libel, but  
note that serious challenges to media freedom remain.

The Office's activities regarding rule of law, including  
training to increase professionalization of judges,  
prosecutors and defense lawyers, reinforce the Azerbaijani  
authorities' commitment to undertake a comprehensive reform  
of the judiciary. We agree that significant shortcomings  
still need to be addressed in this area. We therefore fully  
support the Office's intention to continue its focus on  
administration of justice in the coming year.

We also support the Office's commitment to advancing  
democratic governance in Azerbaijan and promoting reforms to  
bring Azerbaijan's legislation in line with international  
standards. Implementation of legislation, in particular  
regarding elections and freedom of assembly, should continue  
to be a focus of the Office.

We appreciate the Ambassador's May statement regarding the  
importance of an amended NGO law that fully meets  
international standards. We encourage the Government of  
Azerbaijan to consult with the OSCE and others regarding the  
recently-amended laws on NGOs, religion, and the media. We  
encourage the Office, as well as the Government of  
Azerbaijan, to collaborate with civil society, and to develop  
constructive solutions for some of Azerbaijan's most pressing  
human rights problems.

Recent high-level visits by United States officials to Azerbaijan underscore the importance that we attach to strengthening our bilateral relationship, and improving regional security. We reaffirm the United States' commitment to continue working together with the Government of Azerbaijan and the OSCE Office in Baku to advance Azerbaijan's development as a prosperous, modern democratic country.

Ambassador Cankorel, we wish you all the best for your work in the coming year.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

End text.  
CLINTON